DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 299 627 CS 506 417

AUTHOR Crawford, Lyall
TITLE The Stillpoint: Taoist Quietism, Human Relationships, and Living Peacefully.
PUB DATE Nov 88
NOTE 17p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Speech Communication Association (74th, New Orleans, LA, November 3-6, 1988).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Viewpoints (120)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Human Relations; Interpersonal Communication; *Interpersonal Relationship; Life Satisfaction; Peace; Philosophy; Self Actualization; *Taoism
IDENTIFIERS Classics (Literature); Oriental Literature; *Peace Education; Philosophical Influences; *Tao Te Ching

ABSTRACT

As individuals and social beings, at whatever the level and complexity of organization, a gentle spirit and manner weaken aggressiveness and mean-mindedness. The idea that peaceful persons make for a peaceful world can be explored by considering philosophical Taoism. An examination of the first nine chapters of D. C. Lau's translation of "Lao Tzu" or "Tao Te Ching," the acknowledged classic of philosophical Taoism, illustrates the usefulness of "Lao Tzu" in contemplating a gentle and compassionate life in the midst of personal and global conflict. In essence, the counsel given is that if peaceful persons are to make for a peaceful world they should be authentic, gentle, and unassuming in their relationships with each other. In addition, they must realize that too many distinctions according to wealth, power, or intelligence divide society and make unnecessary conflict inevitable. The conscious decision to live a simple life and thus preserve the whole and interdependence of human existence, and the recognition that the human being is embedded in Nature, take one to the personal experience of the perennial philosophy--"That art thou." At this point, the stillpoint where Taoist quietism can settle the human heart, the perverse nature of war and internecine struggle is seen for what it is. (MM)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED299627

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Lyall Crawford

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☐ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

THE STILLPOINT: TAOIST QUIETISM, HUMAN RELATIONSHIPS, AND LIVING PEACEFULLY

Paper presented at the national meeting of the
Speech Communication Association

Peace Communication Commission/
International and Intercultural Division Interest Groups

November 3-6, 1988
New Orleans, LA

Lyall Crawford
Department of Communication
Weber State College
Ogden, UT 84408-1903
(801) 626-6426

CS506417

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

THE STILLPOINT:
TAOIST QUIETISM, HUMAN RELATIONSHIPS, AND LIVING PEACEFULLY

> At the still point of the turning world. Neither flesh nor fleshless;
> Neither from nor towards; at the still point, there the dance is,
> But neither arrest nor movement. And do not call it fixity,
> Where past and future are gathered. Neither movement from nor towards,
> Neither ascent nor decline. Except for the point, the still point,
> There would be no dance, and there is only the dance.
> I can only say, there we have been: but I cannot say where.
> And I cannot say, how long, for that is to place it in time.
>
> T.S. Eliot, **Four Quartets**

T.S. Eliot's (1963) "still point" sounds like a peaceful place--a place without location and a place without time. It seems similar to the Tao that is beyond expression, the void of creation that issues forth the ten thousand things. It brings to mind "black holes," phenomena of the universe so dense that even light cannot escape. A pristine morning. A gentle rain. Timeless events that also appear to rest on Eliot's point of stillness.

The theme of this essay is that peaceful persons make for a peaceful world. It is an old, old idea yet it is still, I believe, an idea that is undeniable and persuasive. As individuals and as social beings, whatever the level and complexity of organization, a gentle spirit and a gentle manner weaken aggressiveness and mean-mindedness. It is more difficult to quarrel with a person who does not want to quarrel, but wishes instead to settle differences in a more harmonious way. It is more difficult to pervert the "basic goodness," the fundamental sanity that exists within and between persons if consensus is otherwise, if others will not participate. Perhaps contention can be a legitimate human episode but it need not be debilitating. It is not necessary to impoverish ourselves and diminish our human dignity just because we are unique and singular as persons because we are also connected, we are also not separate from one another. And it is the recognition of this human connection, our interdependence and unity, that can initiate the journey toward personal and global peace. Thich Nhat Hanh (1988) has observed: "When you produce peace and happiness in yourself, you begin to realize peace for the whole world" (p. 14).

This essay explores the idea that peaceful persons make for a peaceful world by considering philosophical Taoism and some of what can be learned from this perspective in terms of healthy human relationships and peaceful co-existence.

The acknowledged classic of philosophical Taoism is the Lao Tzu, also known as the Tao Te Ching. There are many translations and interpretations of this little book. In fact, it is said that only the Bible has been translated more. For our purposes, we will rely on the reputable and widely accepted translation of D.C. Lau (1963). It is not the intent of this discussion to present a comprehensive treatment of philosophical Taoism and thus survey a number of translations, interpretations, and commentaries. Instead, we will use D.C. Lau's translation to identify and comment on selected facets of philosophical Taoism that pertain to human relationships and peaceful living.

Tradition has it that the Lao Tzu was written by a man of the same name who was an older contemporary of Confucius (551-479 B.C.). However, modern scholarship suggests that the work is more likely to be an anthology of "wise sayings" compiled around the fourth century B.C. In fact, D.C. Lau (1963, p. 12) contends that there is no solid historical evidence to support the belief that Lao Tzu was a real person, that he actually existed.

The Lao Tzu consists of roughly 5000 characters. It has long had a profound influence on Chinese thought. The book is typically divided into two parts, 37 chapters in the first part or Book 1 and 44 chapters in Book 2 (D.C. Lau, 1963, p. 7). Even in translation, which means that most of the rhyming schemes are lost, it is more poetry than prose. Although a number of translators and interpreters have treated the work in a mystical vein, D.C. Lau prefers to see it as a survival manual for the common man during the Warring States Period (480-222 B.C.), and as counsel with regard to political issues and how to rule. This view is compatible with the theme of this essay. What can this Chinese classic teach us when it comes to being a peaceful person during a time of turmoil?

We will proceed by simply looking through the first nine chapters of D.C. Lau's (1963) translation of the Lao Tzu and selecting and commenting on passages that pertain to the theme of this essay. (A consideration of all 81 chapters would make our discussion too long.) Naturally, there will be a bias to the passages selected and the commentary provided. What strikes me and the manner in which I interpret it will differ from another person considering the same text. This is one of the reasons that the Lao Tzu has remained popular through the centuries and been translated and interpreted so many times -- it can be read at so many different levels and understood in so many different ways. And each reading by the same person at different times can bring to light an entirely new perspective with regard to the relevance of philosophical Taoism in this day and age. What follows, then, is yet another interpretation of a very small portion of this

ancient classic, an interpretation that attempts to demonstrate the usefulness of the Lao Tzu when it comes to a genuine desire to live a gentle and compassionate life in the midst of personal and global conflict.

In the second chapter of D.C. Lau's (1963) translation of the Lao Tzu we find these words:

> Therefore the sage keeps to the deed that consists in taking no action and practises the teaching that uses no words. (p. 58)

What occurs to me when I consider this passage is that the sage or the person who follows the Tao is not conspicuous in word or behavior. Instead, this person manifests a quiet confidence when relating with others and while being-in-the-world -- a presence and an influence so pervasive as to be invisible.

The idea of taking no action (**wu-wei**) means that nothing is forced, nothing is made to happen unnaturally. The implication is that life can be easy, that we don't have to work at having "successful relationships" and being relaxed in the world if we understand the nature of the Tao and live our lives accordingly. There is a Taoist adage that says a free person does not struggle. The intuitive truth of this statement is immediately evident. If I am trying to make a social relationship happen, if I am contesting another in a way that perverts our essential humanness, then I am not free. Most of us know how it feels to force a relationship or to force a situation such as making ourselves do a job that is not a natural expression of who we are. There is always struggle involved because we have separated ourselves from the inherent rhythm of the circumstances, and we usually know that this is what we have done yet, amazingly, we continue to struggle nonetheless. I am convinced that life need not be hard in this way. It is better to simply give up trying to make anything happen. If it isn't working, give it up. Imagine how much more peace there would be if everyone practiced **wu-wei** and stopped trying to force their ways onto others.

My sister was once employed by a man who liked to say: "I hear what you say and I see what you do, and one of the two is going to make an impression upon me." This is merely another way of saying that actions speak louder than words. Both of these expressions are related to the second assertion in the passage we are considering, the part that observes how the sage "practises the teaching that uses no words."

What this means to me is that the person who is sensitive to the Tao does not preach a way of life but rather lives it. For instance, instead of instructing others as to the virtues of

quietism and harmony, this person simply brings these qualities into all interactions with others so that aggressiveness seems obsolete and strife seems unnecessary. The philosophers and sages of traditional China (i.e., before the Republic in 1911) were more concerned with living their philosophies and values than they were with writing about them or speaking about them. The ideal was for one's philosophy to be one's biography. Most of us would vastly refine ourselves as human beings if we adopted this perspective and sincerely tried to consistently behave in a manner compatible with the opinions, attitudes, beliefs, and values that constitute our individual philosophies of living. All too often what we say and what we do are not the same thing, and it is this kind of duplicity that estranges us from the Tao and, in turn, from everyone and everything in our lives. It would seem, then, that the person who is sensitive to the Tao, and therefore concerned with living congruently, is more likely to be content and peaceful within and, consequently, more able to radiate this tranquility into the world.

The passage below is taken from Chapter 3.

> Not to honor men of worth will keep the people from contention; not to value goods which are hard to come by will keep them from theft; not to display what is desirable will keep them from being unsettled of mind. (p. 59)

A toy will often be neglected by the child it belongs to until another child wants to play with it. Then, suddenly, the toy acquires new value for the child who owns it and it is not uncommon for a dispute to occur over who is to play with the toy.

Our culture values achievement and notoriety. We derive pleasure from displaying our goods, and many of us actually assess our self-worth on the basis of what we achieve or possess. The bigger and better and more expensive our "toys," meaning achievements or possessions, then the more worthy we are as human beings and the more prestige we are accorded by our society. This manner of being-in-the-world is a perfect recipe for chaos and it is exactly contrary to the Taoist perspective expressed in the passage above.

When we concentrate on the tangible or materialistic dimensions of human experience and existence, we seem more vulnerable to the kinds of behavior that diminish us as persons and separate us from one another. When we concentrate on achieving status and establishing reputations and making ourselves important by virtue of our accomplishments, we seem more vulnerable to the pitfalls of self-involvement and selfishness. Contention, theft, and unsettled minds mitigate against peaceful living.

The last two lines in Chapter 5 are:

> Much speech leads inevitably to silence.
> Better to hold fast to the void. (p. 61)

An obvious way of considering this passage is to suggest that talk, at least the amount of talk, is probably not the measure of a relationship. The cliche that "talk is cheap" expresses this idea. The experience of living closely with someone for a reasonably long period of time -- as I did as a Peace Corps volunteer in Ethiopia -- gives one the opportunity to appreciate the communicative value of silence when in the presence of another person. When talk runs out, when speech has been exhausted and fails to connect those participating, this is when quiet can prevail and the resonance of silence can be experienced and appreciated.

Silence is the container of speech. It is the silence between the sounds that makes them meaningful. And when sound gives way to silence in a more complete and enduring way, the most profound kinds of human communion can be realized.

Consider this somewhat lengthy quotation taken from David Steindl-Rast's (1988) discussion of Haiku poetry.

> The Haiku is, paradoxically, a poem about silence. Its very core is silence. There is probably no shorter poetic form in world literature than the classical Haiku with its seventeen syllables and, yet, the masters put these seventeen syllables down with a gesture of apology, which makes it clear that the words merely serve the silence. All that matters is the silence. The Haiku is a scaffold of words; what is being constructed is a poem of silence; and when it is ready, the poet gives a little kick, as it were, to the scaffold. It tumbles, and silence alone stands.
>
> Evening rain
> The banana leaf
> Speaks of it first.
>
> We can almost hear the first big raindrops falling one by one. But this is already the moment after the decisive one; the moment after the one that held its breath in limitless anticipation. This is not a poem about rain, but about the silence before the rain. A strange poem, the Haiku! It zeroes in on the here and now which is nowhere. It celebrates the all-oneness of aloneness in all the bliss of its poignant pain. It stakes out territory for discovery precisely where life is most daily. And while setting up landmarks of adventure, it wipes out its own footprints. It

> denies itself. For it shoots words like arrows at the target of silence. Every word that hits the mark returns to the silence out of which it has come. (p. 70)

These passages remind me of how important it is to acknowledge the vital role that silence plays, or fails to play, in the lives of all of us. It is silence that allows us to hear the "inner voice" that springs from our "authentic self" and that connects us, I believe, to our very human hearts and our basic human sanity. The counsel I find in the words of the Lao Tzu having to do with talk and silence and holding fast to the void concerns the significance of solitude and contemplation in the day-to-day affairs of ordinary persons. It seems to me that contemplative time apart from the mundane distractions of life is a potent remedy for conflict and strife. If each of us could and would quiet ourselves and be still, truly still, then discord would diminish. It seems so simple and yet it also seems so very difficult to do because many of us, perhaps, would rather be distracted. Many of us, perhaps, are not really interested in peaceful lives, in peaceful relationships and, consequently, in a peaceful existence for everyone.

Consider this passage from Chapter 7.

> Therefore the sage puts his person last and it comes first,
> Treats it as extraneous to himself and it is preserved.
>
> Is it not because he is without thought of self that he is able to accomplish his private ends? (p. 63)

The Christian phrase "and the last shall be first" comes immediately to mind, but these words from the Lao Tzu strike me as decidedly more practical. While they may contain an element of altruism -- putting one's self aside for others -- the central idea appears more concerned with self-preservation.

It is quite possible that an exaggerated sense of self can actually lead to its undoing. A person filled with self-identity may ultimately be exceedingly vulnerable to the loss of identity altogether (a good thing, incidentally, and one way, perhaps, to get there, but most arrogant people don't appear to be arrogant for this reason). Arrogance and self-importance have a mysterious way of turning for those who become captured by their apparent appeal. When one becomes too important, too identified with the personal self, it is not uncommon for an experience to occur that demonstrates the pseudo-security of this behavior. It can be as innocuous as tripping when one is flaunting gracefulness or dropping a word when one is caught up in eloquence. Incidents such as these are little reminders that flip one back into the greater scheme of things, that, as the

saying goes, put one in one's place. In my opinion, it is virtually impossible to be arrogant and totally self-involved if one has even a glimmer of a more expansive vision, and the miracle of an embodied consciousness is only the very beginning of this awareness. So, a person sensitive to the Tao is not attached to the self. Instead, the self is treated casually and preserved. This means that there is another person in the world who is potentially able to radiate peacefulness from the heart.

There is a twist to this idea of putting one's person last and therefore coming first. This twist can be phrased this way -- By putting my self first I put everyone else before me. The principle here has to do with self-reliance. If I am competent as an individual and during the course of my relationships with others, then I am able to behave cleanly most of the time. In other words, my connections with other people are not needy and debilitating. Because I am trying to continually refine myself as a human being and because I have reached a reasonable level of development in this regard, my chances of having nurturing interactions with others are increased. Increased also is the possibility of human harmony.

The last two lines of this passage from Chapter 7 of the Lao Tzu are clearly practical in nature. The counsel given is straightforward; namely, that the very act of relinquishing self-concern facilitates the accomplishment of personal goals.

An exaggerated self-consciousness can impede personal achievements. Most of us have experienced how easily we can do a particular task until something is at stake. Then, we loose our composure, our performance suffers, and we fail to do well what we normally do well. A game of cards for matches is not the same game as high-stakes betting. Target practice for pleasure is not the same as a bull's-eye with a price unless, of course, you are able to do what the Lao Tzu suggests and put your self aside. Then, no matter what the stakes, no matter what the external circumstances, your finesse is unimpaired, your performance is unaffected, and the task is confidently completed.

This kind of self-assuredness that comes from the absence of affectation and identifying with the self promotes a type of social integrity that is more likely to be peaceful than hostile. Persons who have confidence in their abilities are able to extend beyond their personal concerns. Because they are not overly involved with themselves they are able to recognize how their various talents can be orchestrated for a greater social good, and they are not as likely to compete with one another. So, a very simple progression which begins with forgetting the self and personal competence and evolves into an expanded social awareness based on cooperation rather than competition is another scenario

of peaceful co-existence derived from the Lao Tzu. I once heard the Catholic priest and theologian Father William McNamarra say: "It's not that we think little of the self, it's that we think of the self little." This assertion is clearly compatible with the passage we are considering from the Lao Tzu, and it extends it beyond a technique of personal survival to a perspective more altruistic in nature. One behavioral outcome of this idea is a greater availability for others and the increased possibility of compassion instead of hatred or indifference.

D.C. Lau (1963) translates a portion of Chapter 8 of the Lao Tzu this way:

> Highest good is like water. Because water excels in benefiting the myriad creatures without contending with them and settles where none would like to be, it comes close to the way. (p. 64)

Water is truly a remarkable substance. For all of us who inhabit the material and phenomenal world it is synonymous with life itself. It is not surprising, then, that water is used to represent important dimensions of philosophical Taoism, or that the characteristics of water expressed in this passage are easily extended and applied to human relationships.

The passage contains two main assertions -- the idea of benefiting without contending and the idea of settling where none would like to be.

Think of what it would be like if during the course of our interactions with one another we were able to be genuinely engaged. Imagine the kind of communicating that would take place and the nature of the relationships that would be created. Perhaps you have encountered a person who was gentle and authentic and without arrogance, and who seemed to enliven the circumstances and lift the characters of everyone present. This is what I mean by genuine engagement. This is what the water metaphor suggests -- that a person sensitive to the Tao, and with a total absence of contention or aggression, naturally nourishes others. It is an image of the Earth. Organic. Without perversion. And it is another facet of the peaceful person.

A number of images are suggested by the second idea in this passage. For instance, mountain water flows to the valley and thereby relinquishes its swiftness and clarity. Water may be stagnant in a lowland. Water can make its way to places that appear insignificant or unappealing, and thus locate itself where none would like to be. How can this possibly be "close to the way" or like the "highest good"? We can respond to this question by imagining how a person possessing these qualities of water would appear to behave in the world.

It seems to me that a person respectful of the Tao and possessing water-like qualities would be far more concerned, in a non-identified way, with personal integrity and authenticity than with position, wealth or influence. The issue is not what one does and therefore how one is perceived in the social hierarchy, but rather who one is. Recognition on the part of others is far less important, if important at all, than the discipline of precision while performing ordinary tasks, while being an ordinary person. Anything can be done in an exquisite way--drinking a glass of water, driving a bus, removing a slug from the trail so it won't be stepped on. Any gesture made can be made with so much heart and genuineness that it actually transforms the situation from mundane to sublime and back again. And the act itself is intrinsically rewarding.

Bright sunlight on the snow.
Lighting incense at the shrine.
Putting crumbs out for the birds.
Preparing soup -- what pleasure!

One need not have position or influence to be in the world in this way. A person sensitive to the Tao may, like water, run quietly and become stagnant in the lowlands and yet, at the same time and because of these very qualities, be nurturing beyond what any of us can imagine. In fact, shunning the low places impedes the possibility of realizing these water-like qualities and experiencing the human heartedness that can issue from selflessness and authenticity. Persons who are like water in this way are the invisible ones who quietly provide a foundation of sanity for individuals and cultures and the world-at-large, and it is this foundation of sanity that makes peace a feasible idea. From this perspective, then, it is easy to see how these water-like qualities mark one as "close to the way" and "like the highest good."

All of D.C. Lau's (1963) translation of Chapter 9 in the Lao Tzu is relevant to the theme of this essay and it reiterates certain ideas that have already been commented on.

Rather than fill it to the brim by keeping it upright
Better to have stopped in time;
Hammer it to a point
And the sharpness cannot be preserved for ever;
There may be gold and jade to fill a hall
But there is none who can keep them.
To be overbearing when one has wealth and
position
Is to bring calamity upon oneself.
To retire when the task is accomplished
Is the way of heaven. (p. 65)

D.C. Lau (1963) informs us that the first two lines of this chapter refer to "a vessel which is said to have been in the temple of Chou (or Lu). It stands in position when empty but overturns when full. The moral is that humility is a necessary virtue, especially for those in high position" (p. 65). And it has been suggested in previous commentary in this essay that not only is humility a necessary behavioral trait for those who would have nurturing relationships and peaceful lives, but that seeking high position may actually be inappropriate for the person truly sensitive to the Tao. This latter idea can be associated with the issue of global peace.

Assume, for a moment, that philosophical Taoism as interpreted thus far in this essay is a reasonable perspective for a peaceful world; that it represents, as this essay argues, a view of human nature and relationships and a sensitivity to Earth occurrences and ecology that would facilitate human harmony from the smallest to the largest scale, from the individual to the world-as-community. In light of this assumption, without being specific and deliberately risking a reckless generalization, most prominent politicians and world leaders don't appear to be Taoist in the manner in which they conduct themselves in public. Bravado seems to have more currency, especially with regard to foreign affairs, than genuine attempts of negotiation cast within a framework that recognizes the inescapable conditions that tie us all, in basic life-and-death ways, to the preservation of the planet. (Behind-the-scenes nuclear arms negotiators for the super powers are probably the exception here.) If the media can be believed, it seems that there is a tendency on the part of policy-makers, administrators, public officials and business with vested interests to foul our nest to an incredible extent because it is inconvenient to live in a way that places personal concerns within the context of overall consequences -- the long overdue clean-up of Boston Harbor may be a case in point. Philosophical Taoism places humanity in Nature, not the other way around. From this perspective, human beings are not the measure of all things. The point is that public office and prominent or high position as they are currently practiced appear markedly incompatible with the principles of philosophical Taoism. The moral of the vessel in the temple of Chou having to do with humility as a necessary virtue for those in high position appears to be lost on the prominent politicians and world leaders of our day. Of course, there are exceptions -- for example, U Thant, past Secretary General of the United Nations. But, overall, the argument holds: Those who are visible because of commonly recognized position and power do not seem sensitive to the Tao, and those who are sensitive to the Tao are not commonly recognized as persons of position and power, nor are they likely to seek such prominence. The creative resolution of this paradox -- a benign kind of anarchy, perhaps -- would probably go a long

way toward tranquility within one's self and harmony in one's relationships with others. A clear understanding of how and when to stop in time is a necessary awareness if there is to be an enlightened society. To fill a vessel to its brim is not the middle way. So, these first two lines of Chapter 9 show us once again that arrogance and self-importance are inappropriate for a person who appreciates the Tao, that humility is a spawning ground for peace.

The next two lines of Chapter 9 caution us against exceeding the "turning point".

> Hammer it to a point
> And the sharpness cannot be preserved for ever; (p. 65)

A point made too sharp becomes dull. There is a limit to how far one can go and achieve the same result. It is said that returning is the nature of the Tao, that every event and every process contains the seed of its opposite. Consequently, too much of a "good thing" can become toxic, just as "squalor" can become "bliss". The phrase "exhausting the yang to return to the yin" is another expression of this idea.

In philosophical Taoism when this idea is applied to human affairs it means that a person sensitive to the Tao avoids extremes, excesses and complacency (an assertion made explicitly in one of the later chapters of the Lao Tzu). Think of the unnecessary drama that would be eliminated in our personal and interpersonal experiences if most of us most of the time were able to live our lives in this way. The so-called lower emotions which are extreme in nature such as possessiveness and jealousy, anger and rage, would be far less prevalent in our personal lives and, by extension, in our community and even in our world. The opportunity for peaceful co-existence is greater when the extreme behaviors that dehumanize us are recognized for what they are and struck from our repertoires of social intercourse.

Not only is it wise, according to the Lao Tzu, to be mindful of our extremes (i.e., the boundaries of our thoughts and our behaviors), but it is also counselled that we are to be mindful of our excesses (i.e., the amount of our thoughts and our behaviors). Too much thinking in one way, too much doing that is the same, makes one narrow in perspective. When this occurs the human heart is fertile for prejudice, bigotry, and narrow-mindedness. And a heart so perverted does not make for a peaceful world.

It is crucial that the idea having to do with avoiding complacency not be missed in terms of what has just been stated about extremes and excesses. A way of being-in-the-world that is

not extreme or excessive in thought or behavior is anything but complacent, if by complacent one means a passive kind of self-satisfaction. On the contrary, to avoid complacency places one exactly in the middle of life, exactly on the spot of one's existence. Once this awareness has occurred it is difficult to ignore the responsibility of being present, and genuine, and gentle. Although we can distract ourselves, and it seems that many of us do, we cannot escape the ultimate realization that each one of us, by virtue of what we actually think and say and by virtue of how we actually behave, definitively shape our personal experience and make ourselves into the persons that we are. We frequently influence the experience of others as well. The Lao Tzu counsels us to be sensitive to the "turning point;" to intuitively know when what is sharp will become dull, when what is important will become insignificant, when love can turn to hate. Knowledge of the "turning point" is a crucial discriminating awareness. Properly practiced it can keep our aggressions from reaching the extremes of magnitude that now potentially exist. If peaceful persons are to make for a peaceful world, then it seems clear, among other things, that this kind of discriminating awareness must be exercised.

When I consider the remaining lines in Chapter 9 of the Lao Tzu, what comes immediately to mind is the practice of voluntary simplicity and the association that may be made between it and non-violence. I am thinking specifically of the perfect commentary Richard Gregg (1977) provides for the next five lines in Chapter 9. First, the lines:

> There may be gold and jade to fill a hall
> But there is none who can keep them.
> To be overbearing when one has wealth and
> position
> Is to bring calamity upon oneself. (p. 65)

And here is an excerpt from Gregg's essay about voluntary simplicity that nicely brings together these words from the Lao Tzu with how the practice of voluntary simplicity can promote non-violence and peaceful living.

> For those who believe in non-violence, simplicity is essential. Many possessions involve violence in the form of police protection and law suits. The concentration of much property in one person's possession creates resentment and envy or a sense of inferiority among others who do not have it. Such feelings, after they have accumulated long enough, become the motives which some day find release in acts of mob violence. Hence, the possession of much property becomes inconsistent with principles of non-violence. Simplicity helps to prevent violence. (p. 25)

It appears to me that Gregg is advocating a kind of economic entropy. Certainly, much of the business community would cease to function in its typical manner if the accumulation of property and wealth was no longer an exceedingly important part of the game. It is difficult to argue against the idea that the concentration of wealth and property and power in the hands of a few make them conspicuous in a way that can spark social instability. Overly identifying with the material world and being excessively attached to possessions, behavior the Lao Tzu discourages again and again, is dangerous because it contains the seeds of calamity. To fill the halls with gold and jade is contrary to the natural order and subject to upheaval when the perversion becomes too great. Gold and jade are better left in the mountain where they naturally belong. Then, people are more likely to be humble and content, rather than overbearing because of wealth and position; they are more likely to experience a settled heart and thus live quietly and simply and peacefully.

The last two lines of Chapter 9 remind us again that arrogance is not the way of the Tao.

> To retire when the task is accomplished
> Is the way of heaven. (p. 65)

The completion of a task is one thing. The expectation or desire for credit or recognition is quite another. Sometimes we behave in certain ways while fully expecting to be acknowledged and rewarded for what we have done. Sometimes we'd like others to know what we have done, but we certainly don't expect to be rewarded. And sometimes our gesture is made completely free from the expectations of recognition and reward. It is this last way of behaving-in-the-world that the Lao Tzu likens to the way of heaven; it is this last way of being-in-the-world that is characteristic of a person who is sensitive to the Tao.

If we apply this idea to interpersonal communication and the human relationships that are constituted by the very nature of our transactions with one another, it is easy to see that the concepts of credit and blame are not valued by those who do their task and then retire. Without credit and blame there can be no sense of arrogance and importance because no one is trying to win a conversation or cleverly show how someone else is wrong. Instead, the intent of communication is communion -- the word itself is derived from the idea of standing on the same side of a wall -- and when it occurs, infrequent though this may be, the experience alone is more than sufficient for all concerned, and retiring inconspicuously and thereby genuinely surrendering to the next moment is only natural. Consequently, reward and recognition simply don't exist when communication becomes communion, when communication is experienced as union with an

other. And each time we experience genuine contact with others in the form of heartfelt communication and communion is an instance when the likelihood of hostility and aggression is diminished. The simple and long-standing realization that what we do to others we do to our selves as well appears obvious when we truly connect through the heart. (It also becomes obvious that what we do for others we also do for our selves.) So, from this perspective, the idea of harming one another is not tenable; from this perspective it is possible to observe: "Here I am right here shooting at me over there, and there I am over there shooting at me right here." Clearly, this is a ridiculous state of affairs and to persist in this kind of behavior is not sane -- although pointing out the insanity of aggression and war certainly hasn't deterred their occurrence. We are more likely to participate in natural and nurturing relationships and to experience a peaceful global community when it is widely understood that we are not separate from one another. Persons sensitive to the Tao, even during periods of intense alienation, never loose sight of this organic and holistic way of interpreting their experience.

We have now looked through the initial nine chapters of D.C. Lau's (1963) translation of the Lao Tzu and made commentary on selected passages. The basic purpose of the proceeding discussion has been to suggest, in an interpretive manner, kinds of counsel and lines of reasoning seemingly inherent in philosophical Taoism that may be made to pertain to human relationships and peaceful living. In essence, the counsel given, dating from the fourth century B.C., is that if peaceful persons are to make for a peaceful world we are to be authentic and gentle and unassuming in our relationships with one another, and we are to realize that too many distinctions according to wealth or power or intelligence etc. divide society and make unnecessary conflict inevitable. The conscious decision to live simple lives and thus preserve the whole and interdependence of human existence, and to recognize that human being is embedded in Nature, take one to the personal experience of the perennial philosophy -- tat tvam asi -- "That art thou" (Huxley, 1944, 1945, p. 2). At this point, the stillpoint where Taoist quietism can settle the human heart, the perverse nature of war and internecine struggle is seen for what it is.

REFERENCES AND RELATED READING

Eliot, T.S. (1963). **Collected poems 1909-1962.** New York: Harcourt, Brace & World.

Gregg, R. (1977). Voluntary simplicity (1). **The CoEvolution Quarterly**, Summer, 20-27.

Hayward, J.W. (1987). **Shifting worlds changing minds: Where the sciences and Buddhism meet.** Boston, MA: Shambhala.

Huxley, A. (1944, 1945). **The perennial philosophy.** New York: Harper & Row.

Koller, J.M. (1970). **Oriental philosophies.** New York: Charles Scribner's Sons.

Lau, D.C. (1963). **Lao Tzu/Tao te ching.** Middlesex, England: Penguin.

Steindl-Rast, D. (1988). **A listening heart: The art of contemplative living.** New York: Crossroad.

Suzuki, S. (1970). **Zen mind, beginner's mind: Informal talks on Zen meditation and practice.** New York: Weatherhill.

Thich Nhat Hanh. (1988). The heart of understanding. **The Sun: A Magazine of Ideas**, 152, 4-15.

Trungpa, C. (1978, 1984). **Shambhala: The sacred path of the warrior.** New York: Bantam.